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CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

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The appeal to the authority of Christ in pending questions of biblical criticism.—Four possible views.—Christ knew the historical facts involved and revealed them.—Or, He knew them but withheld them.—Or, He did not know them nor pass upon them.—Or, He did not know them, but taught the current views about them as final.—Traditional conservatism holds to the first view. Liberal criticism holds to the second or third view.—The second view to be preferred.—Christ was justified in not correcting erroneous views on these matters.—His apparent justification of traditional views of the Old Testament can be explained.—Partial knowledge is not absolute mistake.

Our conception of the development of the Old Testament Scriptures involves weighty Christological conclusions, either as postulates or as inferences. One's view of the composition of these writings is largely determined by or determines one's doctrine of the Christ-mind. Either the traditionalist is right in his assumption that Christ pronounced authoritatively on questions of criticism, or the radical, in his inference that Christ's knowledge was either naturally limited or voluntarily withheld. The frequent appeal to the authority of Christ as the final test of critical questions has too often failed adequately to discriminate the elements of the problem. The present discussion is an attempt to analyze the implications of this appeal and to consider one of them in detail.

Our Lord either knew or did not know the critical facts in question. In the first case he either revealed or concealed the truth; in the second he was either ignorant or mistaken. Thus four views of his teachings are possible:

(1) If Christ knew the precise historical facts, and his recorded statements literally and adequately represent these

facts, the traditional conceptions of Christ and of criticism are justified.

(2) If Christ knew the facts to be such as the advanced critics suppose, yet withheld them, the critics are approved, but Christ is to be vindicated.

(3) If Christ had no primary knowledge of the facts but taught the current views, though not regarding them as necessarily final, there is no high court of appeal. The problems of criticism must, in that case, be settled by purely literary canons.

(4) If Christ regarded and taught as final conclusions the views traditionally accredited to him, and these views are incorrect, an appeal to his authority is obviously idle, and our conception of his nature must be greatly altered.

The last three possibilities are almost equally repugnant to the conservative critic. Concealment, ignorance, or error he is loth to attribute to the great Teacher. But if we assume that the conclusions of liberal criticism are essentially true, we are compelled to choose one of these three explanations. Practically the choice lies between the hypothesis of silence and that of ignorance, as seen in "(2)" and "(3)," since either adequately explains the alleged variance of Christ's assertions with the facts, and is less antagonistic than "(4)" to the accepted views of our Lord's nature. The hypothesis of ignorance is, perhaps, most favorably received by a majority of those who feel compelled to accept the more revolutionary conclusions of historical criticism, but that of silence is here presented as offering an easier solution to many minds, and being in general worthy of more consideration than it usually receives.

The question at issue lies almost equally in the field of exegesis and that of ethics. We shall undertake to show, first, the legitimacy of silence on Christ's part in view of certain general characteristics of his mission and teaching; and, secondly, the adequacy of this explanation in the crucial case of the whole controversy—Matt. 22:41-46.

I. Was it justifiable for Christ to leave uncorrected erroneous views of the details of the authorship and composition of the Old Testament? Here are two questions: (1) Was it obliga-

tory to communicate all the truth? (2) Was it right to confirm error by maintaining the accepted views?

In reply to the first question we should say that there is no reason for attributing to Christ any subordinate aims not directly contributory to his main purpose. His life was, perhaps, the most concentrated in aim ever lived. His ministry was brief, his diversions few, his extraneous teaching practically *nil*. His activity was centered in the impartation of the essential principles of his kingdom.

The historical setting and theological implications of this concrete religion were but dimly shadowed forth by the Savior. This is well said by the author of *God in His World* (pp. 148-9): "We see the God in Christ in the fact that he never suggested enigmas of Providence, free will, foreknowledge, the origin of evil. The problematic situations presented to him in the cases of the tribute money, the sinful woman, the woman who had seven husbands, did not elicit from him any discussion of them or any attempt at their solution. He taught through parables, and the parable is an evasion of mental analysis."

Christ's immediate and pressing aim was to authenticate himself and his teachings as Messianic. It is chiefly for this purpose that he refers to the Old Testament. For this end two things were essential. First, that the book should be from God; and, secondly, that it should prophesy of him what he claimed.

Assuming still the truth of liberal criticism, is not the Old Testament as divine in origin if written by one hundred men as by thirty? Is it not equally from God if a copy of a compilation or a duplicate of an autograph? Is it not as really, though differently, from God if we regard it as a final revelation in substance, though not in form, as if we attempt to stamp human words with a mechanical divine imprint?

Opposed to this view stands only the illogical assertion that if the Bible be false in any particular, it is untrustworthy as a whole; a statement as true as that a man, to know anything, must know everything. Such is the state of our knowledge that the most

we can say is, that if any part of the Bible falsifies history or betrays our fundamental convictions, that part is not from God. The facts concerning details of authorship, composition and exegesis might have been widely different from what the Jews of Christ's day supposed, even such as would have destroyed their faith in the divine origin of the Bible, yet its essential teachings have come from God. If this be possible, it cannot be considered necessary that Christ should have vindicated every detail of its literary development. The naked assertion of its divine authority was both intrinsically true and sufficient for the Jews, who were already convinced of the fact.

Equally consistent with the results of liberal criticism is the Messianic character of the Old Testament. If Christ transcended the prophetic descriptions of himself why should not the latter equally surpass, in their content, the intelligent vision of the prophet? "Prophecy is not history written beforehand." Rather is it ideal anticipation with historical fulfillment. As Lyman Abbott has recently expressed himself: "History is greater than prophecy, because God's providence is greater than man's inspired imagination." Let it be granted that the primary reference of the prophecies was as much to contemporaneous as to coming events; to an earthly as much as to a divine ruler; if they still contain the potent germ of a Messianic hope there would seem to be no reason why Christ should vindicate to the Jews the details of the inspiration and deliverance of these oracles. His object was that they should accept his word and should do so only from a just belief in the authority of the Old Testament. Provided that belief had a legitimate objective basis it was not of paramount importance that its subjective ground be just in every detail.

II. Will this theory satisfactorily explain the actual instances of Christ's apparent justification of traditional views of the Old Testament?

A case containing every essential element of the problem before us is found in Matt. 22: 41-46 (cf. Mark 12: 35-37; Luke 20: 41-44):

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The son* of David. He said unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying,

The Lord said unto my Lord,

Sit thou on my right hand,

Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet?

If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

The traditionalist view of this passage is represented by Bishop Ellicott: "What we may deduce from this passage is this, first, that the psalm was written by David ; secondly, that David was here writing by direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost; thirdly, that the reference to the Messiah is so distinct that David may be regarded as consciously speaking of him."¹

We undertake to show that if this psalm were neither of Davidic authorship nor conscious Messianic reference, Christ might still have used it as he has, and be justified in the resulting confirmation of error.

The incident in Matt. 22:41-46 occurred on Tuesday of passion week. The day seems to have been largely occupied in discussions between Christ and his enemies in Jerusalem, of which this instance is the culmination. The order and spirit of these scenes is significant:

1. The withered fig-tree, Matt. 21:20-22.
2. Christ's authority questioned, Matt. 21:23-27.
3. Three parables against the Pharisees, Matt. 21:28-22:14.
4. Question concerning tribute money, Matt. 22:15-22.
5. Question of the Sadducees about the resurrection, Matt. 22:23-33.
6. Question of a lawyer as to the "great commandment," Matt. 22:34-40.
7. Christ's question in return: "What think ye of the Christ, whose son is he?" Matt. 22:41-46.

The temper of the Pharisees is indicated in Matt. 22:15:

¹ *Christus Comprobator*, London, 1892, p. 174.

"Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might ensnare him in his talk." His last word in his discussion with the elders about his authority was: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." The three parables were directed against the Pharisees. Of his reply concerning the tribute money we read: they "were not able to take hold of the saying before the people." The Sadducees were summarily silenced. The lawyer was so treated that "no man after that durst ask him (Christ) any questions."

Thus, on the one side there is an attempt to entrap Christ by puzzling queries, and on the other a refusal to respond or a baffling reply as ingenious as honest. The contrast between the statements: "a lawyer asked him a question tempting him," and "Jesus asked them a question," brings out the retaliatory nature of Christ's words. It suggests that Christ will confute the Pharisees with their own logic. Every proposition of the Master's is one which they already hold. He simply shows them the conclusions that should be drawn from what they, at least, regard as established premises. He demonstrates their inconsistency in not admitting that the Messiah is greater than David. This only was essential to his immediate purpose. The passage is a lesson in logic not in criticism. There are three facts premised, and a conclusion drawn:

- (1) The Christ is David's son.
- (2) A Jewish father would not address one who was *merely* his son as his superior.
- (3) David does so address the Messiah ("my Lord.")
- (4) Therefore the Christ is more than merely a son of David.

Our Savior appeals to the general testimony of Scripture respecting the ancestry of the Christ; to its particular testimony as to David's address to the Messiah; and to a social custom grounded both in their Scriptures and their life. His attitude is not that of assertion or explanation; in other words, his language is neither dogmatic nor exegetic. The fact that his evident purpose is to confound the Pharisees, and that he is so careful to throw the burden of the premises upon them is sufficient to com-

pel us to refrain from drawing any positive conclusions from this passage as to what Christ would teach on the questions of biblical criticism involved.

It is not desired, however, to represent this contention of Christ's as having for its sole purpose the discomfiture of the Pharisees. We may well regard this scene as being implicitly one of the final declarations of Christ's Messiahship, as was his triumphal entry two days before. Possibly we may go still further with Godet, who says that this passage is a "purposed anticipatory refutation of the later charges of the Sanhedrin that he was guilty of blasphemy in making himself the Son of God." Such an aim, if it be granted, does not, we judge, materially affect the question of Christ's attitude towards the Scriptures.

It will still be inconceivable to many that Christ should have appealed to David and his prophetic insight were it not actually the case that David wrote Psalm 110, and wrote it with a conscious anticipation of the Messiah. Suppose, then, that Nathan was the author, and referred, by "my lord," to David. It might still be maintained that David was a type of the Messiah, though the prophet was not conscious of the fact. The prophecy would be seen, however, to find its historical and complete fulfillment in Christ. He brings to light that salvation which the prophets had sought in vain to understand, though they themselves prophesied concerning it. It is not necessary to demonstrate this supposition. Its bare plausibility excludes an unconditional appeal to the authority of Christ. We are compelled to hold him responsible only for the essential truth of his interpretation of the Psalm. This aim seems equally well realized in the critical as in the traditional view.

We have still to consider more explicitly whether Christ could justly confirm error. Our view here will depend on our ability to discriminate between partial knowledge and an absolute mistake. Had the Jews conceived that the Old Testament did not prophesy of a Messiah this would have been unqualified error. But assuming that David did not write Psalm 110, how far was the belief in the Davidic authorship erroneous? Entirely so from a formal point of view. But this relative error must be

judged in relation to its bearing on the religious life of the hearers. Faith in Jehovah and his eternal promises was the end sought in all their knowledge. Their conviction that David was the author of this Psalm deepened their faith in God. Nor was this conviction of the Davidic authorship of the Psalm an error in relation to their moral and religious life. The ideas suggested to their minds by the thought of David writing this Psalm were, on the whole, correct, and calculated to promote a reverence for God and his truth. As they dwell on this thought they see God speaking to man; they see the piercing ken of divinity parting the veil of human ignorance; they see the divine hope that is the illumination of our race shining so bright as to divert attention from the human medium. Religiously speaking, it is of relatively small importance who the Hebrew seer was, provided we have good evidence that the Psalm arose in the order of God's revelation, and bears the stamp of Jesus Christ and of history for the justification of its essential teaching. The end of religious instruction is not to create and carry along an accurate understanding of every detail. The mind is not so constituted, either in its individual or its national development, as to perceive immediately any great truth in the perfect exactitude of all its relations. To have attempted to readjust radically the views of the Jews regarding the composition of the Scriptures would have involved an inevitable sacrifice of the possibility of influencing the broad current of this moral and religious thought. Christ came to save, not to educate. It was better that his hearers should be left in life-long error as to details than that their lives should go astray for lack of essentials.

Christ said: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). He said again: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt. 13:11). That he had an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine is further exemplified in the parable of the sower by his private explanation of his public teaching. Not that his teachings on the one hand to the passing crowd and on the other to his disciples were contradictory, but that the latter were more explicit; less

veiled with figure and less obscured by silences. He leaves uncorrected, not to say confirms, erroneous impressions, as that virtue resided in or was transmitted through the hem of his garment (Mark 5:25-34). Inevitable and innumerable misconceptions of his character and doctrine arose, but the instances where, as in the case of the death of Lazarus (John 11:11-14), he corrected a mistaken interpretation of his language are conspicuous by their infrequency. Why, then, he should have attempted to convey to his hearers critical facts respecting the Old Testament that did not contribute materially to his main purpose, that were not inconsistent with the essential truth and religious significance of the current views, that would have excited needless opposition, that were, finally, beyond the intelligent comprehension of an undeveloped historical sense, it is impossible to see.

The view of the Great Teacher here presented is believed to be an exaltation of his wisdom and goodness. It is the doctrine not of Jesuitism but of common sense. It is one of the two reasonable solutions of the Christological difficulties resulting from the conclusions of modern biblical criticism.